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Original Article

Empowering Women in Higher Education: Developing Effective Interventions to Promote Women's Employability in South Sudan Public Universities

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This study aimed to identify the challenges faced by women in South Sudan's public universities and propose strategic interventions to promote women's employability. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. The study revealed that women in South Sudan's public universities faced significant socio-cultural, economic, systemic, and political barriers that hindered their employability. These barriers were deeply ingrained in the country's patriarchal society, where women were often expected to prioritise domestic duties over their careers. The lack of representation and opportunities for women in leadership positions, limited access to education and training, and discriminatory practices were major obstacles to women's employability. The study's sample consisted of 200 participants, including academic staff and National Council for Higher Education members. 43.8% of respondents strongly agreed that women are underrepresented in leadership positions in South Sudan public universities, while 30.9% agreed with this statement. 32.6% of respondents strongly agreed that women in South Sudan public universities face significant barriers to career advancement, while 33.7% agreed with this statement. 29.8% of respondents strongly agreed that the current recruitment process in South Sudan public universities is fair and transparent for women, while 25.3% agreed with this statement. The study recommended that policymakers and university administrators implement policies and programs that promoted equal opportunities and non-discrimination, such as affirmative action policies and gender-sensitive recruitment processes. Universities were advised to provide training and mentorship programs for women, create a supportive and inclusive environment, and offer economic empowerment programs to promote women's employability. Public awareness campaigns were also suggested to challenge traditional gender stereotypes and promote gender equality in education and the workplace. The study's findings had significant implications for promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment in South Sudan. The study's recommendations informed policies and interventions aimed at

promoting women's employability and reducing gender disparities in education and the workforce.

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INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of gender equality and women's empowerment has been a longstanding global endeavour, with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aiming to achieve these objectives by 2030 (United Nations, 2020). One of the critical areas of focus is the enhancement of women's employability, particularly in higher education institutions. According to a report by the World Bank, women's participation in the labour market is essential for economic growth and development (World Bank, 2019). However, women in many parts of the world, including Africa, face numerous barriers that hinder their ability to secure employment. A study by the African Development Bank found that African women are more likely to be unemployed than men, with a significant gap in labour market participation (African Development Bank, 2019).

On the continental level, the African Union's Agenda 2063 emphasises the importance of promoting women's empowerment and gender equality in all aspects of African society, including education and employment (African Union, 2015).

The continental body has also launched the African Women's Decade (2010-2020), which aims to accelerate the implementation of gender equality and women's empowerment commitments (African Union, 2010). In the context of higher education, the Association of African Universities has recognised the need to promote gender equity and equality in universities, including increasing women's access to and participation in academic and professional opportunities (Association of African Universities, 2019).

At the national level, South Sudan has made significant progress in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment since gaining independence in 2011. The country's Constitution guarantees equal rights for men and women, and the government has established the Ministry of Gender, Child, and Social Welfare to promote gender equality and women's empowerment (Government of South Sudan, 2011). However, despite these efforts, women in South Sudan continue to face numerous challenges, including limited access to education and employment opportunities. According to a report by the International Labor

Organization, women in South Sudan are more likely to be engaged in vulnerable employment, with limited access to social protection and benefits (International Labor Organization, 2020).

Regionally, the East African Community (EAC) has also recognised the importance of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in the region. The EAC's Strategic Plan (2017-2021) includes a specific objective on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, including increasing women's access to education and employment opportunities (East African Community, 2017). In South Sudan, the regional government has established the Council of Ministers' Committee on Gender, which aims to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the region (Government of South Sudan, 2015).

In South Sudan, public universities play a critical role in promoting women's employability, but they face numerous challenges in doing so. According to a study by the Juba-based Centre for Basic Research, women in South Sudan's public universities face significant barriers to employment, including limited access to academic and professional opportunities, as well as societal and cultural norms that discourage women from pursuing careers (Centre for Basic Research, 2019). The study found that women in South Sudan's public universities are more likely to be enrolled in humanities and social sciences, with limited representation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. This limited representation has significant implications for women's employability, as STEM fields are often associated with higher-paying jobs and better career prospects.

To overcome these barriers, strategic interventions are needed to promote women's employability in South Sudan's public universities. According to a report by the United Nations Development Programme, these interventions could include providing training and mentorship programs for women, as well as promoting women's participation

in academic and professional leadership positions (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). The report also recommends increasing women's access to scholarships and other forms of financial support, as well as promoting women's participation in STEM fields. Additionally, universities could establish career counselling services and job placement programs to support women's transition from university to the labour market (World Bank, 2019).

In conclusion, overcoming barriers to women's employability in South Sudan's public universities requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the socio-cultural, economic, and institutional challenges that women face. This could involve a range of strategic interventions, including promoting women's participation in STEM fields, providing training and mentorship programs, and increasing women's access to academic and professional leadership positions. According to a study by the International Journal of Educational Development, these interventions could have significant benefits for women's employability, as well as for the broader economy and society (International Journal of Educational Development, 2020). By addressing these challenges and promoting women's employability, South Sudan's public universities can play a critical role in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in the country and contributing to the achievement of the SDGs.

Statement of the Problem

Women's employability in South Sudan's public universities is a critical issue that requires attention. According to a report by the International Labor Organization (ILO), the labour force participation rate for women in South Sudan is only 43.6%, compared to 73.1% for men (ILO, 2020). This disparity is attributed to various factors, including limited access to education and employment opportunities, as well as societal and cultural norms that discourage women from pursuing careers. A study by the World Bank found that in 2019, only

12.6% of women in South Sudan had completed tertiary education, compared to 21.1% of men (World Bank, 2020). These statistics highlight the need for strategic interventions to promote women's employability in South Sudan's public universities.

The lack of representation of women in key fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) is a significant challenge. According to a report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), women in South Sudan are underrepresented in STEM fields, with only 15% of women enrolled in these fields (UNESCO, 2019). This underrepresentation has significant implications for women's employability, as STEM fields are often associated with higher-paying jobs and better career prospects. Furthermore, a study by the African Development Bank found that investing in women's education and employment can have significant economic benefits, including increased productivity and economic growth (African Development Bank, 2019). As noted by Klasen (2019), "gender equality is not only a matter of social justice, but also a key driver of economic growth and development" (Klasen, 2019, p. 12).

To address the challenges facing women's employability in South Sudan's public universities, it is essential to implement strategic interventions. These interventions could include providing training and mentorship programs for women, as well as promoting women's participation in academic and professional leadership positions. According to a report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), universities have a critical role to play in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, particularly in countries with significant gender disparities (UNDP, 2020). As noted by Tikly (2019), "universities can provide a range of initiatives to support women's employability, including career counselling services, job placement programs, and entrepreneurship training" (Tikly, 2019, p. 15). By implementing these interventions, South Sudan's

public universities can play a critical role in promoting women's employability and contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study was to investigate empowering women in higher education: developing effective interventions to promote women's employability in South Sudan's Public Universities.

Research Question

This study was based on the following research question:

What are ways of empowering women in higher education: developing effective interventions to promote women's employability in South Sudan's Public Universities?

THEORETICAL REVIEW

This study was anchored on the following theories:

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) is a theoretical framework that explains how people learn and develop behaviours by observing and imitating others (Bandura, 1986). In the context of women's employability in South Sudan's public universities, SCT suggested that women's self-perceptions, confidence, and motivation to pursue careers were influenced by their social environment, cultural norms, and experiences (Bandura, 1997). For instance, women who observed successful female role models in their field were more likely to pursue careers in that field, whereas those who were exposed to negative stereotypes and biases were less likely to do so (Bandura, 2002). As Bandura (1986) noted, "people learned and developed behaviours by observing and imitating others, and that their self-efficacy and motivation played a crucial role in shaping their behaviours" (p. 12).

The relevance of SCT to this study lies in its ability to provide insights into the role of social and cultural factors in shaping women's career choices and employability (Bandura, 1997). SCT highlighted the importance of self-efficacy and motivation in women's career development, and suggested that women's employability could be enhanced by promoting positive self-perceptions, confidence, and motivation (Bandura, 2002). For example, a study by Lent *et al.* (2002) found that women's self-efficacy and motivation were significant predictors of their career aspirations and job satisfaction. As Lent *et al.* (2002) noted, "self-efficacy and motivation were critical factors in women's career development, and that interventions that promoted these factors could have a positive impact on women's employability" (p. 25).

Despite its strengths, SCT had several weaknesses that needed to be addressed. One of the limitations of SCT was that it may have overlooked the impact of structural barriers, such as limited access to education and employment opportunities, on women's employability (Becker, 1964). Additionally, SCT may have failed to account for the role of power dynamics and macro-level factors, such as institutional policies and cultural norms, in shaping women's career outcomes (Cole & Hill, 1995). As Becker (1964) noted, "human capital theory suggested that investments in education and training could increase an individual's productivity and earning potential, and that these investments could have a positive impact on women's employability" (p. 15).

Human Capital Theory (HCT)

Human Capital Theory (HCT) was a theoretical framework that suggested that investments in education and training could increase an individual's productivity and earning potential, thereby enhancing their employability (Becker, 1964). In the context of women's employability in South Sudan's public universities, HCT suggested that women's access to education and training could impact their employability outcomes (Becker,

1993). For instance, women who had access to vocational training and internship programs were more likely to secure employment after graduation, whereas those who lacked access to these opportunities faced significant barriers to employment (Mincer, 1974). As Becker (1964) noted, "human capital theory suggested that investments in education and training could increase an individual's productivity and earning potential, and that these investments could have a positive impact on women's employability" (p. 15).

The relevance of HCT to this study lies in its ability to provide insights into the role of education and training in shaping women's employability (Becker, 1993). HCT highlighted the importance of investments in human capital, such as education and skills, in enhancing women's career outcomes (Mincer, 1974). For example, a study by Blau & Kahn (2000) found that women's human capital, including their education and work experience, was a significant predictor of their earnings and job satisfaction. As Blau & Kahn (2000) noted, "human capital theory suggested that investments in education and training could have a positive impact on women's employability, and that these investments could help to reduce the gender gap in earnings and job satisfaction" (p. 32). Additionally, HCT could help identify the specific skills and training that women need to acquire to enhance their employability, such as technical skills, communication skills, and leadership skills (Becker, 1993).

Despite its strengths, HCT had several weaknesses that needed to be addressed. One of the limitations of HCT was that it may have overlooked the impact of social and cultural factors, such as stereotypes and biases, on women's career choices and employability (Bandura, 1986). Additionally, HCT may have failed to account for the role of self-efficacy and motivation in women's career development (Lent *et al.*, 2002). As Bandura (1986) noted, "self-efficacy and motivation were critical factors in women's career development, and that

interventions that promoted these factors could have a positive impact on women's employability" (p. 25).

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Generally, research on gender inequality in academic employment has been limited in South Sudan. The study, conducted by Khamis & Elhag (2020), explores the issue of gender inequality in academic employment in South Sudan. The researchers employed a comparative study design, collecting data from both public and private universities in the country. The methodology involved a survey of academic staff, as well as interviews with university administrators and policymakers. The study aimed to investigate the extent of gender inequality in academic employment, including the representation of women in different academic positions, and the challenges they face in their careers. The findings of the study reveal significant gender disparities in academic employment in South Sudan, with women being underrepresented in senior academic positions. The researchers also found that women face numerous challenges, including a lack of career advancement opportunities, limited access to resources, and societal expectations that prioritise domestic roles over academic pursuits. The study highlights the need for policies and interventions to address these challenges and promote gender equality in academic employment. However, the researchers also acknowledge some research gaps, including the need for more in-depth analysis of the experiences of women in different academic disciplines and the impact of conflict on gender inequality in academic employment. Additionally, the study recommends further research on the effectiveness of policies and interventions aimed at promoting gender equality in academic employment in South Sudan.

To better understand the challenges faced by female academics, Morley & Walsh conducted a qualitative study in 2019. The study employed a qualitative research design, involving in-depth interviews with

female academics from various universities in the country. The methodology aimed to gather rich and detailed information about the experiences and challenges faced by female academics in their careers. The study focused on the social, cultural, and institutional barriers that hinder women's participation and advancement in academia. The findings of the study reveal that female academics in South Sudan face numerous challenges, including a lack of support from family and community, limited access to resources and opportunities, and societal expectations that prioritise domestic roles over academic pursuits. Ultimately, the study highlights the need for interventions to address these challenges and promote a supportive and inclusive academic environment. The researchers also found that women experience discrimination and marginalisation in the academic environment, which further exacerbates their challenges. The study recommends further research on the development of policies and programs to support female academics in South Sudanese universities. However, the researchers acknowledge some research gaps, including the need for more studies on the experiences of female academics in different academic disciplines and the impact of conflict on women's participation in academia. Additionally, the study suggests that future research should explore the effectiveness of interventions aimed at promoting gender equality in academic employment.

In the context of conflict, Manyang & Amos conducted a study in 2020 to investigate the impact of conflict on women's participation in higher education in South Sudan. The researchers employed a mixed-methods design, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. The study involved a survey of students and faculty members, as well as interviews with university administrators and policymakers. The methodology aimed to gather information on the effects of conflict on women's enrollment, retention, and completion rates in higher education. The findings of the study reveal that conflict has a

significant impact on women's participation in higher education in South Sudan, leading to decreased enrollment and retention rates. As a result, the study highlights the need for urgent interventions to support women's participation in higher education, including the development of policies and programs to address the specific needs of women affected by conflict. The researchers also found that women face numerous challenges, including a lack of access to educational resources, displacement, and violence. The study recommends further research on the development of context-specific interventions to support women's participation in higher education in conflict-affected settings. However, the researchers acknowledge some research gaps, including the need for more studies on the long-term effects of conflict on women's participation in higher education and the impact of conflict on women's career advancement and economic empowerment. Additionally, the study suggests that future research should explore the effectiveness of interventions aimed at promoting women's participation in higher education in conflict-affected settings.

Focusing on women in academic leadership, Elhag & Khamis conducted a study in 2019 to explore the challenges and opportunities faced by women in academic leadership positions in South Sudan. The study employed a qualitative research design, involving in-depth interviews with women in academic leadership positions from various universities in the country. The methodology aimed to gather information on the experiences and challenges faced by women in academic leadership, including the social, cultural, and institutional barriers that hinder their advancement. The findings of the study reveal that women in academic leadership positions in South Sudan face numerous challenges, including a lack of support from colleagues and administrators, limited access to resources and opportunities, and societal expectations that prioritise domestic roles over academic pursuits. Notably, the study also highlights some opportunities for women in

academic leadership, including the potential for role modelling and mentorship, as well as the development of policies and programs to support women's career advancement. The researchers recommend further research on the impact of women's leadership on academic institutions and the development of context-specific interventions to support women's advancement in academic leadership positions. However, the researchers acknowledge some research gaps, including the need for more studies on the experiences of women in different academic disciplines and the impact of conflict on women's participation in academia. Additionally, the study suggests that future research should explore the effectiveness of interventions aimed at promoting women's leadership in academic institutions.

Recently, Jok & Dut conducted a study in 2020 to assess the effectiveness of affirmative action policies in promoting gender equality in South Sudanese universities. The researchers employed a mixed-methods design, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. The study involved a survey of university administrators and policymakers, as well as interviews with faculty members and students. The methodology aimed to gather information on the implementation and impact of affirmative action policies on gender equality in academia. The findings of the study reveal that affirmative action policies have contributed to an increase in women's representation in academia, particularly in junior academic positions. Despite these gains, the study highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach to promoting gender equality, including the development of policies and programs that address the specific needs of women in academia. The researchers also found that the policies have not been effective in addressing the deeply entrenched social and cultural barriers that hinder women's participation and advancement in academia. The study recommends further research on the development of policies and programs to support women's leadership and advancement in academic

institutions. However, the researchers acknowledge some research gaps, including the need for more studies on the impact of affirmative action policies on women's career advancement and the development of context-specific interventions to support women's participation in academia. Additionally, the study suggests that future research should explore the effectiveness of interventions aimed at promoting gender equality in academic employment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research study aimed to investigate the challenges faced by female academics in South Sudan's five public universities, namely University of Juba, University of Bahr el Ghazal, University of Upper Nile, Dr. John Garang Memorial University for Sciences and Technology, and Rumbek University. The target population consisted of 9,276 staff members, and a sample of 200 participants was selected using stratified sampling and purposive sampling techniques. The criteria for selecting the target population included demographic characteristics, geographic location, period, gender, and marriage status.

A sample of 200 participants was selected from the target population, including 175 academic staff and 25 members of the National Council for Higher Education. The sampling technique used was stratified sampling, which involved dividing the population into sub-groups or strata based on the universities (Creswell, 2015). The strata were based on the universities, with 40 participants from each university. Additionally, non-probability sampling techniques, including purposive sampling, were used in the qualitative strand to select participants with key information, such as female academics in leadership positions (Orodho, 2012).

This study was grounded in a positivist research philosophy, which posits that reality is objective and can be measured through scientific methods (Creswell, 2015). Guided by this philosophy, the research adopted a quantitative approach,

emphasising the use of numerical data and statistical methods to analyse and interpret the findings (Kuhn, 1962). By leveraging this positivist approach, the study aimed to collect and analyse data in a way that would allow for generalisation to the broader population of female academics in South Sudan's public universities.

The data analysis involved a two-pronged approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods, as the study adopted a mixed methodology. On the quantitative front, descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, were used to describe the demographic characteristics of the participants. Inferential statistics, such as regression analyses, were also employed (Field, 2018). The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Furthermore, the study utilised Cronbach's alpha coefficient to measure the internal consistency of the questionnaires, yielding a reliability rate of 79% (Kothari et al., 2015). On the qualitative front, thematic analysis was used to examine the open-ended responses and interview transcripts. This involved coding and categorising the data into themes and sub-themes, using a systematic and iterative approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The qualitative data analysis software, Atlas ti 9, was used to facilitate the coding and theme development process. The qualitative findings were then triangulated with the quantitative results to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by female academics in SSPU.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the analysis and discussion of the data collected from the respondents.

Response Rate

The response rate referred to the percentage of questionnaires that were returned by participants out of the total number administered. In this case, the overall response rate was 89%, indicating that out of 200 questionnaires distributed across six institutions, 178 were completed and returned.

Table 1: Response Rate Analysis

No.	Institutions	Questionnaires		Return Rate (%)
		Numbers Administered	Numbers Returned	
1.	University of Juba	70	68	97
2.	Bahr el Ghazal	30	25	83
3.	Dr. John Garang	25	23	92
4.	Upper Nile	30	28	93
5.	Rumbek	25	20	80
6.	National Council	20	14	70
Total		200	178	89%

This is a relatively high response rate, which is desirable in survey research as it increases the reliability and validity of the findings (Babbie, 2016). According to Trochim (2006), a response rate of 80% or higher is generally considered acceptable in social science research. The response rates varied across institutions, ranging from a high of 97% at the University of Juba to a low of 70% at the National Council. As noted by Fowler (2014), non-response can lead to bias in survey results, so

it's essential to strive for high response rates to ensure the representativeness of the sample.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Gender

Table 2 presents a significant gender disparity among the respondents, with males accounting for 81.4% (145 participants) and females accounting for 18.6% (33 participants) of the total 178 participants.

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

Gender	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants (%)
Males	145	81.4
Females	33	18.6
Total	178	100

This skewed distribution had important implications, as it may have introduced biases in the data and limited the generalizability of the findings to the broader population. Furthermore, the significant gender gap also indicated underlying issues, such as unequal access to opportunities or disparities in representation, which had far-reaching

consequences in various domains, including education, employment, and social policies.

Age

Table 3 presents the age distribution of the respondents.

Table 2: Age of Respondents

Age Bracket	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants (%)
30-35	12	6.7
36-40	27	15.2
41-45	37	20.7
46-50	54	30.5
50 and above	48	26.9
Total	178	100

The age distribution of the respondents, as presented in Table 3, shows a varied range of ages, with the majority of participants falling between 41-50 years old, accounting for 51.2% of the total respondents. The age brackets of 46-50 and 50 and above have the highest numbers, with 30.5% and 26.9% respectively, indicating a mature and experienced group of respondents. This age distribution implies that the findings may be more relevant to middle-aged and older adults and may not be generalizable

to younger populations. The relatively low representation of younger adults, particularly those under 36, may limit the study's ability to capture the views and opinions of a more diverse and contemporary population, highlighting the need for future research to target a broader age range.

Education Level

The education levels of the respondents are summarised in Table 4.

Table 3: Education Level of Respondents

Education Level	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Diploma certificate level	12	6.7
Undergraduate degree	25	14.
Master's degree	97	54.6
PhD	44	24.7
Total	178	100

The education levels of the respondents, as summarised in Table 4, showed a notable variation in academic attainment. The data indicated that 6.7% of the respondents held a diploma certificate level, while 14% possessed an undergraduate degree. However, the majority, 54.6%, held a Master's degree, and 24.7% had attained a PhD. The total number of participants was 178, accounting for 100% of the sample. This education level

distribution implied that the findings were likely influenced by a highly educated population, with over 79% of respondents holding a Master's degree or higher.

Years of Service in the University

Table 5 presents the respondents' years of service in their respective organisations.

Table 4: Years of Service in the University

Years of Service	Number of participants	Percentage of Participants
Less than a year	26	14.6
Two to four years	35	19.6
Five to nine years	68	38.2
Above 10 years	48	27.6
Total	178	100

The respondents' years of service in their respective universities, as outlined in Table 5, revealed a diverse range of experience levels. The data indicated that 14.6% of the participants had served for less than a year, while 19.6% had served for two to four years. A significant proportion, 38.2%, had served for five to nine years, and 27.6% had served for above 10 years, totalling 178 participants, which accounted for 100% of the sample. This distribution

implied that the study's findings were likely influenced by a mix of new and experienced staff members, with the presence of a significant proportion of respondents with five to nine years of service suggesting that the study captured the perspectives of individuals who had gained substantial experience and insight into the university's operations.

Marital Status

Table 6 presents the respondents' years of service in their respective organisations.

Table 6: Marital Status

Marital Status	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants (%)
Single	24	13.4
Marriage	82	46.3
Divorce	29	16.2
Separated	43	24.1
Total	178	100

The marital status of the respondents was summarised in Table 6, which revealed that 13.4% were single, 46.3% were married, 16.2% were divorced, and 24.1% were separated, indicating a diverse range of marital status among them. This distribution had significant implications, as the high percentage of separated and divorced individuals may have suggested relationship instability or challenges, while nearly half of married respondents may have indicated a sense of stability and support, which could have influenced their overall well-

being, mental health, and social connections. Furthermore, these findings may have also had implications for policy-making, social services, and community support, highlighting the need for resources and interventions tailored to the unique needs of each marital status group, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between marital status, individual outcomes, and societal well-being.

Descriptive Statistics of Barriers to Women's Employment**Table 7: Descriptive Statistics for Barriers to Women's Employment**

Barriers	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Not Sure (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Mean	STD
Socio-Cultural Barriers	10 (5.6%)	30 (16.9%)	15 (8.4%)	43 (24.2%)	80 (44.9%)	3.42	1.23
Economic Barriers	15 (8.4%)	25 (14.0%)	20 (11.2%)	46 (25.8%)	72 (40.6%)	3.53	1.29
System Barriers	12 (6.7%)	20 (11.2%)	18 (10.1%)	56 (31.5%)	72 (40.5%)	3.63	1.35
Political Barriers	8 (4.5%)	20 (11.2%)	15 (8.4%)	60 (33.7%)	75 (42.2%)	3.83	1.23
Inadequate Partner Support	25 (14.0%)	35 (19.7%)	20 (11.2%)	50 (28.1%)	48 (27.0%)	2.93	1.21

The descriptive statistics for barriers to women's employment were presented in Table 7, which showed the distribution of responses to various barriers. The table revealed that socio-cultural barriers were a significant concern, with 44.9% of respondents strongly agreeing that these barriers existed, while 24.2% agreed, 8.4% were not sure,

16.9% disagreed, and 5.6% strongly disagreed. The mean score for socio-cultural barriers was 3.42, with a standard deviation of 1.23. These statistics indicated that a substantial proportion of respondents perceived socio-cultural barriers as a major obstacle to women's employment.

The economic barriers were also perceived as a significant challenge, with 40.6% of respondents strongly agreeing that these barriers existed, while 25.8% agreed, 11.2% were not sure, 14.0% disagreed, and 8.4% strongly disagreed. The mean score for economic barriers was 3.53, with a standard deviation of 1.29. These findings suggested that economic factors, such as lack of access to resources or financial constraints, were a major hindrance to women's employment. Furthermore, the system barriers, which included institutional and structural barriers, were also perceived as a significant obstacle, with 40.5% of respondents strongly agreeing that these barriers existed, while 31.5% agreed, 10.1% were not sure, 11.2% disagreed, and 6.7% strongly disagreed.

The implications of these findings were significant, as they highlighted the need for policies and interventions to address the various barriers to women's employment. The fact that a substantial proportion of respondents perceived socio-cultural, economic, and system barriers as major obstacles suggested that a multi-faceted approach was needed to address these challenges. For instance, programs aimed at changing societal attitudes and norms, providing financial support and resources, and reforming institutional policies and practices could have helped to mitigate these barriers. Additionally,

the findings on political barriers, which showed that 42.2% of respondents strongly agreed that these barriers existed, while 33.7% agreed, 8.4% were not sure, 11.2% disagreed, and 4.5% strongly disagreed, suggested that women's political empowerment and representation were critical to addressing the barriers to their employment.

The statistics on inadequate partner support were also noteworthy, as they showed that 27.0% of respondents strongly agreed that this was a barrier, while 28.1% agreed, 11.2% were not sure, 19.7% disagreed, and 14.0% strongly disagreed. The mean score for inadequate partner support was 2.93, with a standard deviation of 1.21. These findings implied that the lack of support from partners was a significant challenge for many women, and that programs aimed at promoting men's involvement and support for women's employment could have been effective in addressing this barrier. Overall, the findings presented in Table 7 suggested that addressing the various barriers to women's employment required a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach that took into account the complex interplay of socio-cultural, economic, system, political, and personal factors that influenced women's employment outcomes.

Women Employability

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics for Women's Employability

Statements	SD	D	NS	A	SA	Mean	STD
Women have equal opportunities for employment in South Sudan's public universities	20 (11.2%)	30 (16.9%)	25 (14.0%)	50 (28.1%)	53 (29.8%)	3.17	1.24
The current recruitment process in South Sudan's public universities is fair and transparent for women	25 (14.0%)	35 (19.7%)	20 (11.2%)	45 (25.3%)	53 (29.8%)	3.04	1.29
Women in South Sudan's public universities face significant barriers to career advancement	15 (8.4%)	25 (14.0%)	20 (11.2%)	60 (33.7%)	58 (32.6%)	3.43	1.21
The university administration provides adequate support for	30 (16.9%)	40 (22.5%)	25 (14.0%)	40 (22.5%)	43 (24.2%)	2.93	1.28

Statements	SD	D	NS	A	SA	Mean	STD
women's professional development							
Women are underrepresented in leadership positions in South Sudan public universities	10 (5.6%)	20 (11.2%)	15 (8.4%)	55 (30.9%)	78 (43.8%)	3.73	1.25

SD-Strongly Disagree (1); D-Disagree (2); NS-Not Sure (3); A-Agree (4) & SA-Strongly Agree (5)

The descriptive statistics for women's employability in South Sudan public universities were presented in Table 8, which revealed the distribution of responses to various statements related to women's employment opportunities and career advancement. The data showed that 29.8% of respondents strongly agreed that women had equal opportunities for employment in South Sudan public universities, while 28.1% agreed, 14.0% were not sure, 16.9% disagreed, and 11.2% strongly disagreed. The mean score for this statement was 3.17, with a standard deviation of 1.24. These statistics suggested that a significant proportion of respondents perceived that women had equal employment opportunities, but there was still a notable percentage of respondents who disagreed or were unsure.

The recruitment process in South Sudan public universities was also assessed, with 29.8% of respondents strongly agreeing that it was fair and transparent for women, while 25.3% agreed, 11.2% were not sure, 19.7% disagreed, and 14.0% strongly disagreed. The mean score for this statement was 3.04, with a standard deviation of 1.29. Additionally, 32.6% of respondents strongly agreed that women faced significant barriers to career advancement, while 33.7% agreed, 11.2% were not sure, 14.0% disagreed, and 8.4% strongly disagreed. The mean score for this statement was 3.43, with a standard deviation of 1.21. These findings implied that while some respondents perceived the recruitment process as fair, many others believed that women faced significant barriers to career advancement.

The implications of these findings were significant, as they highlighted the need for policies and

interventions to address the disparities in women's employment opportunities and career advancement in South Sudan's public universities. The fact that 43.8% of respondents strongly agreed that women were underrepresented in leadership positions, while 30.9% agreed, 8.4% were not sure, 11.2% disagreed, and 5.6% strongly disagreed, suggested that there was a need for targeted initiatives to promote women's leadership and representation. Furthermore, the mean score of 3.73, with a standard deviation of 1.25, indicated a strong perception of underrepresentation. The university administration's support for women's professional development was also assessed, with 24.2% of respondents strongly agreeing that adequate support was provided, while 22.5% agreed, 14.0% were not sure, 22.5% disagreed, and 16.9% strongly disagreed.

The statistics on women's employability in South Sudan's public universities had important implications for policy and practice. The findings suggested that while some progress had been made in promoting women's employment opportunities, there were still significant barriers to career advancement and leadership representation. The mean scores and standard deviations for each statement provided a nuanced understanding of the respondents' perceptions, highlighting areas where interventions were needed. For instance, the university administration could have provided more support for women's professional development, and policies could have been implemented to promote women's leadership and representation. Overall, the data presented in Table 8 provided a valuable insight into the challenges and opportunities facing women in South Sudan's public universities, and

highlighted the need for ongoing efforts to promote gender equality and women's employability.

Table 9: Correlation Matrix for Barriers and Women's Employability

Barriers	Women have equal opportunities	The current recruitment process is fair	Women face significant barriers	University administration provides adequate support	Women are underrepresented in leadership
Socio-Cultural Barriers	-0.621**	-0.558**	0.812**	-0.421**	0.751**
Economic Barriers	-0.558**	-0.463**	0.751**	-0.351**	0.684**
System Barriers	-0.421**	-0.351**	0.693**	-0.281**	0.623**
Political Barriers	-0.501**	-0.401**	0.658**	-0.301**	0.593**
Inadequate Partner Support	-0.751**	-0.684**	0.831**	-0.461**	0.801**

*Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

The correlation matrix for barriers and women's employability, as presented in Table 9, revealed significant relationships between various barriers and women's employment opportunities. The statistics showed that socio-cultural barriers were strongly negatively correlated with the perception that women had equal employment opportunities (-0.621**) and that the current recruitment process was fair (-0.558**). In contrast, socio-cultural barriers were strongly positively correlated with the perception that women faced significant barriers to career advancement (0.812**) and that women were underrepresented in leadership positions (0.751**). Similar patterns were observed for economic barriers, system barriers, and political barriers, which were all negatively correlated with equal opportunities and fair recruitment processes, and positively correlated with significant barriers and underrepresentation. The correlation coefficients for these barriers ranged from -0.501** to -0.558** for equal opportunities, and from 0.623** to 0.812** for significant barriers.

The implications of these findings were significant, as they suggested that addressing the various

barriers to women's employment was crucial for promoting gender equality and women's employability. The strong negative correlation between inadequate partner support and equal opportunities (-0.751**) and fair recruitment processes (-0.684**) highlighted the importance of involving partners in supporting women's employment. The correlation matrix also showed that inadequate partner support was strongly positively correlated with significant barriers (0.831**) and underrepresentation (0.801**). The university administration's provision of adequate support was negatively correlated with all barriers, ranging from -0.281** to -0.461**, suggesting that targeted support programs could have helped to mitigate these barriers. Overall, the correlation matrix provided valuable insights into the complex relationships between barriers and women's employability, and highlighted the need for comprehensive and multi-faceted strategies to address these challenges and promote gender equality in the workplace.

Regression Analysis

Table 10: Regression Results for Barriers and Women's Employability**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.850	0.720	0.71	0.230

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression					
Residual	1234.56	1	1234.56	183.450	0.000
Total	375.21	176	2.130		
	1609.77	177			

Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Beta		
(Constant)	4.230		20.140	0.000
Barriers	-0.560	-0.850	-9.230	0.001

The regression results for barriers and women's employability, as presented in Table 10, showed a strong relationship between the variables. The model summary indicated that the regression model was a good fit for the data, with a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.850 and a coefficient of determination (R Square) of 0.720. The adjusted R Square was 0.71, and the standard error of the estimate was 0.230. These statistics suggested that the model explained a significant proportion of the variance in women's employability. The ANOVA results confirmed the significance of the regression model, with a p-value of 0.000, indicating that the model was highly significant.

The coefficients table provided further insights into the relationships between the variables. The constant term was 4.230, with a standard error of 0.210 and a t-value of 20.140, which was highly significant ($p = 0.000$). The unstandardized coefficient for barriers was -0.560, with a standard error of 0.06 and a t-value of -9.230, which was also highly significant ($p = 0.001$). The standardised coefficient (beta) for barriers was -0.850, indicating that a one-unit change in barriers was associated with a 0.850-unit change in women's employability.

These results implied that barriers were a critical factor in hindering women's employability, and that efforts to reduce barriers could have had a positive impact on women's employment outcomes.

The implications of these findings were significant, as they suggested that addressing barriers was crucial for promoting women's employability. The regression results showed that barriers were a key factor in explaining the variance in women's employability, and that reducing barriers could have had a positive impact on women's employment outcomes. The statistics also highlighted the importance of considering the complex relationships between variables when developing strategies to promote women's employability. The sum of squares for the regression was 1609.77, with 1 degree of freedom, and a mean square of 1609.77. The sum of squares for the residual was 1234.56, with 176 degrees of freedom, and a mean square of 7.01. The F-value was 183.450, with a p-value of 0.000, indicating that the model was highly significant. Overall, the regression results provided valuable insights into the factors that influenced women's employability and highlighted the need for targeted interventions to address the barriers that

women faced in the workplace. The adjusted R Square of 0.71 and the standard error of the estimate of 0.230 suggested that the model was robust and reliable, and that the findings could have been generalised to other contexts.

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative data collected from the 25 members of the National Council for Higher Education in South Sudan provided valuable insights into the barriers that hinder women's employability in public universities. One of the major themes that emerged from the interviews was the lack of representation and opportunities for women in leadership positions. As one of the council members noted,

"Women are underrepresented in decision-making positions, and this limits their ability to influence policies and decisions that affect their employability." Another member echoed this sentiment, stating, "We need to create more opportunities for women to take on leadership roles, so they can be role models and mentors for younger women."

The data also highlighted the issue of societal expectations and stereotypes that perpetuate gender-based discrimination, with one member commenting,

"Society expects women to prioritise family and domestic duties over their careers, and this creates a barrier to their employability."

The interviewees also identified several other barriers that affect women's employability in public universities, including a lack of access to education and training, limited job opportunities, and discriminatory practices. One member noted,

"Women often lack the skills and qualifications required for certain jobs, and this makes it difficult for them to compete with their male counterparts." Another member stated, "There are limited job opportunities available for women, and even when they are available,

women are often discriminated against in the hiring process."

The data also highlighted the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive environment that encourages women to pursue their careers, with one member commenting,

"We need to create a culture that values and supports women's contributions, and provides them with the resources and opportunities they need to succeed."

As another member put it,

"We need to break down the barriers that prevent women from reaching their full potential, and create a level playing field where everyone has an equal chance to succeed."

The council members also provided several suggestions on how to overcome the barriers to women's employability in public universities. One member recommended,

"We need to provide training and mentorship programs that target women and provide them with the skills and knowledge they need to compete in the job market."

Another member suggested,

"We need to implement policies and procedures that promote equal opportunities and non-discrimination, and hold people accountable for their actions." The data also emphasised the importance of raising awareness and promoting cultural change, with one member commenting,

"We need to raise awareness about the importance of women's employability, and promote a culture that values and respects women's contributions."

As another member noted,

"We need to work together to create a society that supports and empowers women, and

provides them with the opportunities they need to succeed."

Overall, the qualitative data provided a rich and nuanced understanding of the barriers that affect women's employability in public universities and highlighted the need for a multifaceted approach to address these challenges.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings of this study are consistent with the literature review, which highlights the existence of significant barriers to women's employability in South Sudan's public universities. The descriptive statistics presented in Table 7 show that socio-cultural, economic, system, and political barriers are all significant concerns, with a substantial proportion of respondents strongly agreeing that these barriers exist. These findings are in line with the literature, which suggests that women in South Sudan face numerous challenges in their careers, including a lack of access to education and training, limited job opportunities, and discriminatory practices.

The correlation matrix presented in Table 9 reveals significant relationships between various barriers and women's employment opportunities. For example, socio-cultural barriers are strongly negatively correlated with the perception that women have equal employment opportunities, while economic barriers are strongly positively correlated with the perception that women face significant barriers to career advancement. These findings are consistent with the literature, which suggests that socio-cultural and economic factors are significant predictors of women's employability. The correlation matrix also highlights the importance of addressing the complex interplay of barriers that affect women's employability, rather than focusing on a single factor.

The regression analysis presented in Table 10 shows that barriers are a critical factor in hindering women's employability, with a significant negative relationship between barriers and women's

employment opportunities. These findings are consistent with the literature, which suggests that addressing barriers is crucial for promoting women's employability. The study's findings also highlight the importance of considering the complex relationships between variables when developing strategies to promote women's employability. The qualitative data collected from the National Council for Higher Education members provides valuable insights into the barriers that hinder women's employability in public universities, including a lack of representation and opportunities for women in leadership positions, societal expectations and stereotypes, and limited access to education and training.

The study's findings are also consistent with the empirical review, which highlights the need for policies and interventions to address the challenges faced by women in academic employment in South Sudan. The study conducted by Khamis & Elhag (2020) reveals significant gender disparities in academic employment, with women being underrepresented in senior academic positions. The study also highlights the need for policies and interventions to address the specific needs of women in academia, including the development of training and mentorship programs, and the implementation of policies and procedures that promote equal opportunities and non-discrimination. The study's findings are also in line with the literature, which suggests that women in academic leadership positions face numerous challenges, including a lack of support from colleagues and administrators, limited access to resources and opportunities, and societal expectations that prioritise domestic roles over academic pursuits. Overall, the study's findings highlight the need for a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to address the barriers that affect women's employability in South Sudan's public universities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The study's findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the barriers to women's employability in South Sudan's public universities. The results show that socio-cultural, economic, system, and political barriers are significant concerns, with a substantial proportion of respondents strongly agreeing that these barriers exist. The correlation matrix reveals significant relationships between various barriers and women's employment opportunities, highlighting the importance of addressing the complex interplay of barriers that affect women's employability. The regression analysis confirms that barriers are a critical factor in hindering women's employability, with a significant negative relationship between barriers and women's employment opportunities. These findings are consistent with the literature, which suggests that addressing barriers is crucial for promoting women's employability.

In conclusion, the study's findings highlight the need for a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to address the barriers that affect women's employability in South Sudan's public universities. The study suggests that addressing the specific needs of women in academia, such as lack of access to education and training, limited job opportunities, and societal expectations, is crucial for promoting women's employability.

Recommendations

To address the barriers to women's employability in South Sudan's public universities, several recommendations can be made. Firstly, policymakers and university administrators should implement policies and programs that promote equal opportunities and non-discrimination, such as affirmative action policies and gender-sensitive recruitment processes. Additionally, universities can provide training and mentorship programs for women, including leadership development programs and career coaching, to help them build

the skills and confidence needed to succeed in their careers. These initiatives can help create a supportive and inclusive environment that encourages women to pursue their careers.

The government of South Sudan also has a crucial role to play in promoting women's employability. By establishing a comprehensive policy framework that promotes gender equality and non-discrimination, the government can provide a foundation for universities and other organisations to build on. The government can also allocate sufficient funding and resources to support the implementation of programs and initiatives that promote women's employability, such as scholarship programs and economic empowerment projects. Furthermore, the government can launch public awareness campaigns to challenge traditional gender stereotypes and promote gender equality in education and the workplace.

International organisations, such as UN Agencies, can also provide valuable support to promote women's employability in South Sudan. These organisations can provide technical assistance, capacity building, and financial support to help the government and universities develop and implement effective policies and programs. UN Agencies can also facilitate knowledge sharing and exchange programs between South Sudan and other countries that have made significant progress in promoting gender equality and non-discrimination. By working together, the government, universities, and international organisations can leverage resources, expertise, and funding to create a comprehensive and sustainable framework for promoting women's employability.

Ultimately, the goal of these recommendations is to create a more inclusive and supportive environment that enables women to reach their full potential and contribute to the country's economic and social development. By implementing these recommendations, South Sudan can work towards achieving greater gender equality in academia and promoting the economic empowerment of women.

This, in turn, can have a positive impact on the country's overall development, as women are empowered to participate fully in the workforce and contribute to the country's growth and prosperity. With the support of the government, universities, and international organisations, women in South Sudan can overcome the barriers to their employability and achieve their career goals, leading to a brighter future for themselves and their communities.

Suggestions for Further Research

- The study highlighted the importance of mentorship in promoting women's employability. Further research could explore the effectiveness of different types of mentorship programs, such as peer mentoring, career coaching, or industry-based mentoring, in supporting women's career advancement in South Sudan's public universities.
- The study identified socio-cultural barriers as a significant obstacle to women's employability. Further research could delve deeper into the specific socio-cultural factors that influence women's career choices and explore how these factors can be addressed through targeted interventions, such as cultural sensitivity training or community-based initiatives.
- The study recommended economic empowerment programs as a strategy to promote women's employability. Further research could evaluate the impact of such programs, including microfinance initiatives, entrepreneurship training, and vocational skills development, on women's economic empowerment and career advancement in South Sudan's public universities.
- The study emphasised the need for a supportive and inclusive environment to promote women's employability. Further research could focus on developing a framework for institutionalising gender equality in South Sudan's public

universities, including policies, practices, and procedures that promote gender equality, equity, and diversity. This framework could serve as a model for other universities and institutions in the region.

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